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# ROBERTSON OF BRIGHTON

1816 - 1853

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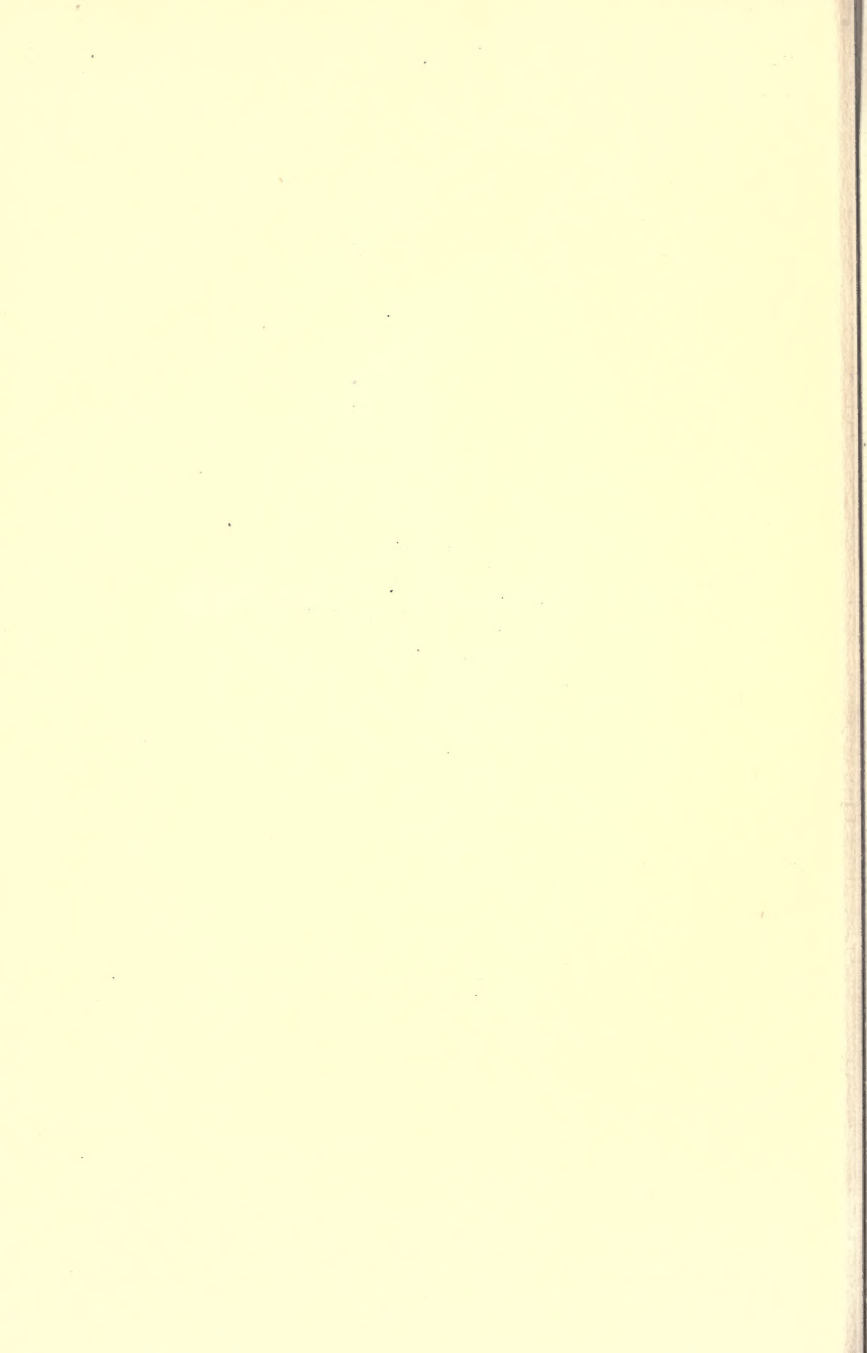


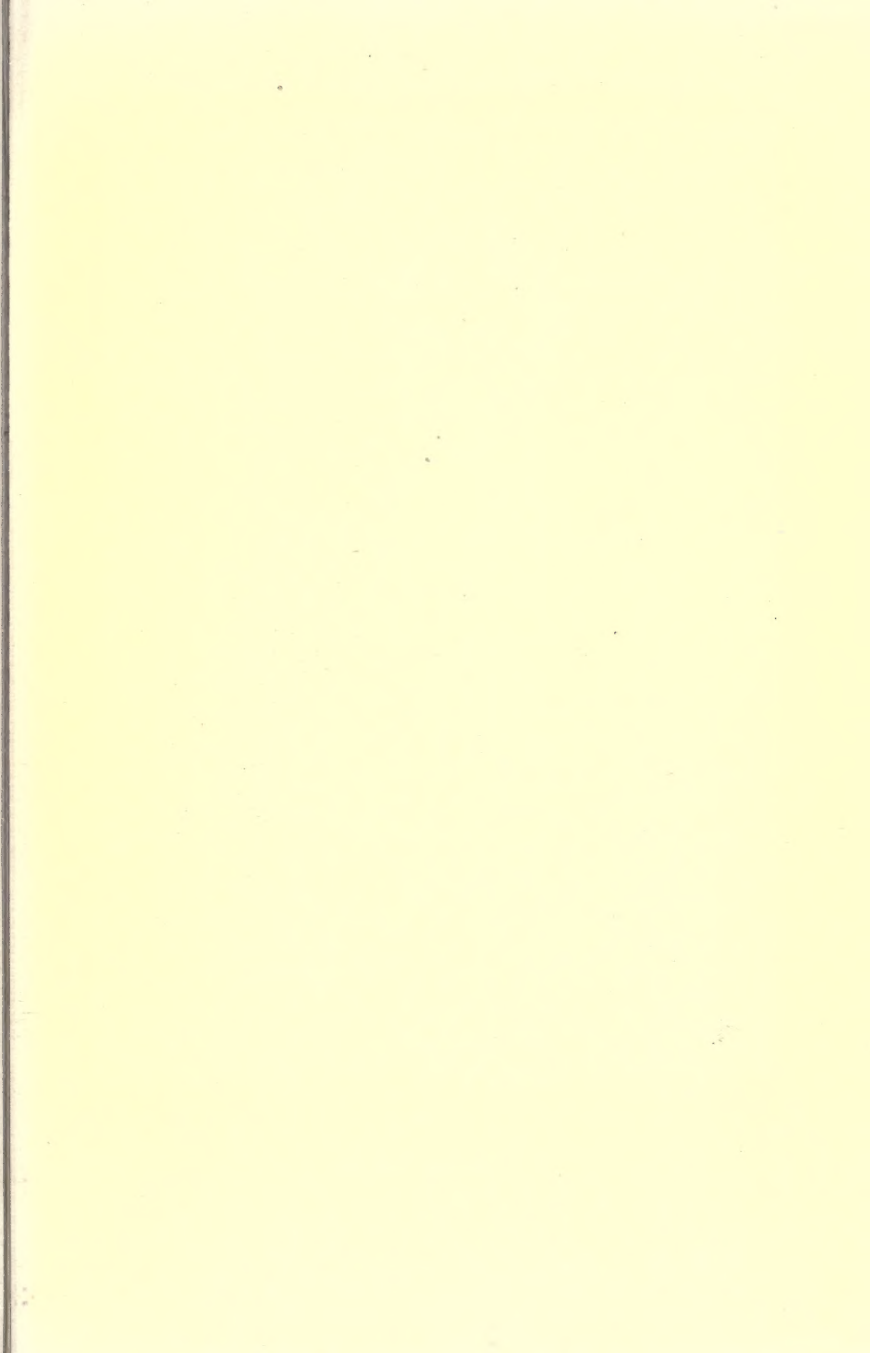


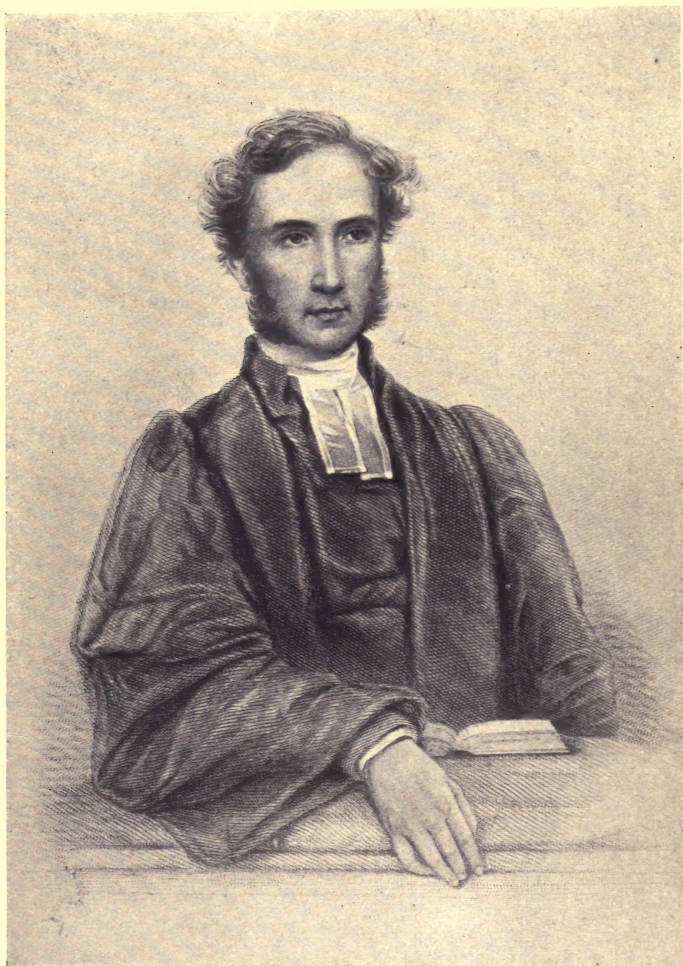
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ROBERTSON OF BRIGHTON

1816-1853









# ROBERTSON OF BRIGHTON

1816-1853

BY  
HENSLEY HENSON

DEAN OF DURHAM

*WITH A PORTRAIT*

LONDON  
SMITH, ELDER & CO., 15, WATERLOO PLACE  
1916

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## PREFACE

IT hardly needs that I should say that my principal source of information as to ROBERTSON'S life and character is found in MR. STOPFORD BROOKE'S volumes. For the rest I have depended on my own inferences from the published Letters and Sermons, on such references to the great Preacher as I could find in contemporaries, on some recent attempts to appraise his career, and on some information privately given to me by some whose memories carried back to his lifetime. I am under particular obligations to the Master of Trinity, the Deans of York and Chichester, and some others, for the kindest response

to my inquiries. MR. FREDERIC HARRISON sent me a letter of unusual interest, and has added to that kindness by permitting me to print it as an Appendix.

I must confess to some surprise, and to much regret, that the ecclesiastical journals have generally ignored the centenary of ROBERTSON'S birth. The ardour which they commonly display in recalling the memory of lesser men (who, however, lack his disqualifying distinction of spiritual independence) forbids the notion that this neglect could have been wholly undesigned. It may also be conceded that for the *Record*, or the *Church Times*, or the *Guardian* to have eulogised ROBERTSON would have inevitably suggested the behaviour of those older partisans who "built the tombs of the prophets" whom their fathers murdered. It is pleasant,

however, to observe that the *British Weekly* devoted a long and appreciative article to ROBERTSON'S character and influence.

For sheer fatuity it would be difficult to surpass the paragraph in which the *Guardian* referred to ROBERTSON. The writer allows himself in some observations on the transiency of the pulpit orator's influence, and offers ROBERTSON as an illustration! "ROBERTSON," he says, "spoke to the hearts of men with marvellous effect, and he won not a few to CHRIST. *Yet the cold print of his discourses leaves readers of the present century little moved; nor is it wholly the reader's fault.*" A few years ago it was estimated that "something like a quarter of a million of copies" of ROBERTSON'S works had been sold in the United States, besides the enormous



sale in this country. Quite recently a cheap popular edition of the sermons has issued from the press. It is probably the case that no Anglican preacher has ever had so extensive and so constant an influence. PROFESSOR PFLEIDERER has set on record his opinion that "in nobility of character," and "in the wealth and depth of his mind," ROBERTSON was superior both to F. D. MAURICE and to CHARLES KINGSLEY. It is pleasant to recall a learned German's homage to an English Preacher—

"The biography of this man, so admirably executed by STOPFORD A. BROOKE, reads like the life of a saint, but of a Protestant and modern saint, who does not escape out of the world, but, as a soldier of GOD, fights the great fight with all ungodliness, with the sins of the upper and the lower classes, with the unreality and falsehood of even religious parties,

who at the same time keeps his own soul unspotted from the world, and who is compelled often and deeply to drain the bitter cup of suffering, which no soldier of God can escape in this world of wickedness and folly. There is little in homiletical literature to compare with the four series of ROBERTSON'S sermons, in respect of wealth and depth of thought, strength of moral pathos, warmth of religious emotion, clearness and vividness of style, and elevation and beauty of language." \*

Appreciations not less favourable have been many. DE PRESSENSÉ'S striking essay was, in the opinion of MR. CHARLES ROBERTSON, the Preacher's only son, "a masterpiece." To represent ROBERTSON as an example of the mere popular preacher, whose influence hardly survives the sound of his voice, is so grotesque a

\* "The Development of Theology in Germany since Kant, and its Progress in Great Britain since 1825," p. 383. By Otto Pfeleiderer. Translated by J. Frederick Smith, (London. 1890.)

perversion of the facts that we must suppose the writer of the paragraph in the *Guardian* to have written in complete ignorance both of the man and of his work.

It is said that many sermons of ROBERTSON exist in manuscript. No fitter celebration of the centenary of his birth could be devised than their publication. In the present circumstances of the nation I must needs think that his distinctive teaching would be timely, relevant, and serviceable in no common degree.

H. HENSLEY HENSON.

DEANERY,  
DURHAM.

*February 14, 1916.*

LECTURE

DELIVERED IN BRIGHTON ON

FEBRUARY 3, 1916

BEING THE CENTENARY OF ROBERTSON'S  
BIRTH





## ROBERTSON OF BRIGHTON

IN the religious history of England during the XIXth century, ROBERTSON of Brighton holds a place apart. Standing outside the great organized factions, whose internecine conflicts then distracted men's minds, and confused their consciences, he was for the most part ignored as well as disliked during his life-time. He started with no special advantages of birth or wealth : he gained none of those academic distinctions which sometimes take their place : he won the patronage of no great man : and secured the public interest by no great book : he received no preferment : he formed no party : he never

preached to the University either in Oxford, or in Cambridge : he was never invited to occupy the pulpit of Westminster or S. Paul's : he never preached at Court : no bishop complimented him with a chaplaincy : the only honorific position he ever held was that of High Sheriff's chaplain : he was the recipient of no honorary degree. Even the inuendoes and criticisms which he felt so deeply, and which his friends resented so bitterly, do not seem to have attracted much attention outside the little canting world of Brighton gossip. You may search the clerical biographies of the period in vain for any reference to his name.

"When MR. ROBERTSON died," wrote the *Saturday Review* in a notice of his posthumously published Sermons, "his

name was scarcely known beyond the circle of his own private friends, and of those among whom he had laboured in his calling. Now, every word he wrote is eagerly sought for, and affectionately treasured up, and meets with the most reverent and admiring welcome from men of all parties and all shades of opinion."

BISHOP THIRLWALL was an eminent and extremely well-informed man holding a great position both in the hierarchy and in the estimate of the educated public. It might have been supposed that his own liberal disposition would have drawn him to be specially interested in the original and independent character of the great Brighton Preacher. In point of fact, the Bishop had never heard of him until ARCHDEACON HARE introduced him, and then his Lordship mistook him for a

Dissenting minister,\* though he also felt the extraordinary quality of the published "Letters," and discerned the fine and noble character which they disclose. Underneath this apparently complete neglect ROBERTSON was making an impression, and establishing an influence, different in kind from any that belonged to his contemporaries, and, as the last sixty years have proved, far more profound and lasting. When after a brief period of no more than six years his ministry was cut short, in circumstances which both displayed his personal devotion and drew attention to

\* "Letters to a Friend," p. 63. By Connop Thirlwall. Ed. Stanley. (London. 1881.)

"The 'Letters' are among the most interesting I have ever read, and the insight which they open into so fine and powerful a mind and so noble a character is what no sermon could give. . . . In the 'Letters' hardly any really important question of such a nature which agitated the public mind escapes notice and discussion."

the relative unimportance of his official position, the public realised with a shock of shame and wonder the magnitude of the loss which his death had inflicted on the nation, and disclosed its own conviction of his value by purchasing edition after edition of his published sermons. When these were followed in 1865 by MR. STOPFORD BROOKE'S admirable and moving volumes, his place in the front rank of English religious leaders was finally established, and has never since been challenged. Such considerable and continuing posthumous influence, following upon a ministry so brief and so comparatively unregarded, is, perhaps, without parallel in our ecclesiastical history.

Think what it means to have died at 37. Most men are only then finding their feet in the matter of convictions,



and only then laying a firm grasp on the business of their lives. What place would KEBLE have held if he had died in 1829; or PUSEY if his potent support of Tractarianism had ceased in 1837; or NEWMAN if his career had closed in 1838; or MAURICE if he had been taken away in 1842; or JAMES ANTHONY FROUDE if his course had ceased in 1855; or, to pass from the Church to the State, if GLADSTONE had died in 1846, or DISRAELI in 1841? If we suffer our minds to travel farther into the past, and recall some of the critical figures of our national history, we are arrested by the same suggestion. Had HENRY VIII. died at 37, that is, in the year 1528, he would have left the reputation of splendid munificence impressively combined with domestic virtue and personal godliness, but there would

have been no Church of England as we have known it. If ARCHBISHOP CRANMER had died at 37, his name would have held no place at all in the history of England. ARCHBISHOP PARKER at 37 was an unknown man with a doubtful reputation for orthodoxy among his neighbours; and ARCHBISHOP LAUD, if he had closed his life in 1610, would have had no wider fame than that which violent temper and extreme opinions could earn for an Oxford theologian. It needs not to multiply examples, but these will suffice to indicate the remarkable significance of the fact, that this relatively obscure Brighton Preacher had succeeded, in a life which reached its term at 37, in making a mark on the spiritual life of his countrymen, which we can see, at the distance of two generations, to have been both deep and permanent.

But, of course, the very circumstance which enhances the greatness of the man, increases the difficulty of his biographers. Of all the famous men of the XIXth century ROBERTSON had the least interesting career, the emptiest of dramatic incident, the poorest in public connexions. A six-years' ministry in a proprietary chapel in a fashionable watering-place is surely the least congruous or probable framework for a spiritual witness of the first quality. Half a dozen small volumes of sermons and addresses, and a few private letters form a slender foundation for a reputation which is, perhaps, more secure both in England and America than that of any other with which it is comparable. The course of his life is soon traced. He was born in London on February 3, 1816, of military ancestry, both his father

and his grandfather being soldiers. It is important to observe that his education was far more varied than is usual with English boys. Beverley Grammar School, Tours, the New Edinburgh Academy (where he came under the influence of the learned and versatile rector, JOHN WILLIAMS, eulogized by SIR WALTER SCOTT as "a heaven-born teacher" and "the best schoolmaster in Europe"), Edinburgh University, finally Brasenose College, Oxford, were the successive scenes of his training. His passionate desire was to follow the family tradition by becoming a soldier, but, having decided that his duty lay in another direction, he declined the offer of a Commission in the 3rd Dragoon Guards, which arrived five days after his matriculation at Oxford.

We are certainly right in ascribing

considerable importance to the military associations of his first years. A naturally ardent disposition received thus a powerful stimulus, and a sensitive character took an impression which was never obliterated. If it would be excessive to say that he regretted his choice of a profession, it is the case that he sometimes contrasted the manliness and simplicity of the soldier's character with the effeminate and tortuous habit which perverted pietism develops, and which the circumstances of his later course forced on his notice. He rejoiced to remember that, not necessity, but his own deliberate choice closed to him the soldier's career. "It was with great delight he told me," writes his friend DAVIES, "that the application for a Commission had been successful, for it would not be said that he went into the Church



because he could not get into the Army." \* Throughout his life, to adopt a picturesque phrase of his own, "he seemed to feel the Queen's broad arrow stamped upon him." At his Ordination the BISHOP OF WINCHESTER gave him as his motto the text from which MR. NICHOLSON, his future rector, had preached the Ordination sermon, "*Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*" His biographer comments on the singular fitness of the Bishop's choice. ROBERTSON entered on his ministry in the spirit of a soldier starting for the Front.

"The enthusiasm which he felt bordered on the stern devotion of LOYOLA, and had, like his, a soldier's spirit at its root. The trumpet sound of that selected verse may, perhaps, have stirred his heart with an association of the *réveillé* he had so often heard as a boy. It is necessary to say

\* "Life and Letters," i. 16. Edited by Stopford A. Brooke. (2 vols. London, 1865.)

once more, because it is one of the key-notes of his character, that all his life long he was a soldier at heart. Again and again he expresses his conviction that, in a military life, the highest self-sacrifice he was capable of could alone have been accomplished. Those who have heard him speak of battle—battle not as an incident of mere war, but as the realisation of death for a noble cause—will remember how his lips quivered, and his eyes flashed, and his voice trembled with restrained emotion. Unconsciously to himself, the ring of his words, the choice of his expressions, his action even in common circumstances, his view of the Universe and of Humanity, were influenced and coloured by the ideal he had formed of a soldier's life, by the passionate longing of his youth to enter it, and by the bitterness of the regret with which he surrendered it." \*

ROBERTSON was a student of military history, and fond of expressing himself in military language. "I am afraid," he

\* "Life and Letters," i. 55, 56.

wrote, " my illustrations are somewhat too military, but I was rocked and cradled to the roar of artillery, and I began life with a preparation for, and appointment to, the 3rd Dragoons. *Dis aliter visum*.\*

What, we must needs ask, was the intellectual habit of the great Preacher? What tastes did he form at the University? What foundation of knowledge sustained his incessant preaching? What were the books which fed his mind, and marked out the courses of his thinking? Was he a hard student, or a steady reader, or merely a dabbler in ephemeral literature? How far did he draw water from contemporary pools? Had he any hobbies, and, if so, how did they bear on his work? All the accounts we have of him certify the brilliance and variety

\* Ibid. ii. 15.

of his conversation, the charm of his personality, the taking ardour of his interest: but we know that good talkers and even admired preachers are not always learned or even well-read, and there is certainly something in the distraction of frequent talking, public and private, which is unfavourable to severe standards of knowledge and accuracy. Of course there are exceptions, such as BARROW, JEREMY TAYLOR, GIBBON, and MACAULAY, but these were giants, and they prove the rule. In a very interesting letter of counsel to a younger friend, written at the end of his life, ROBERTSON throws some light on the points we have raised. On two things he is emphatic. Discursive reading, and solitary reading, are to be at all hazards avoided. He knew by experience both the attractiveness which they present,

and the disappointment which they bring.

“At college I did what you are now going to do—had no one to advise me otherwise; was rather encouraged in it by religious people, who are generally—at least, the so-called religious—the weakest of mankind; and I now feel I was utterly, mournfully, irreparably wrong. The excitement of theological controversy, questions of the day, politics, gleams and flashings of new paths of learning, led me at full speed for three years, modifying my plans perpetually. *Now* I would give £200 a year to have read on a bad plan, chosen for me, but steadily.”\*

Similarly with respect to reading alone—

“I tried this once in Oxford, during a long vacation, thinking to have more uninterrupted time for study, and found the plan a perfect failure. The mind loses its tension for want of society, its interest in its studies, and that healthy freshness which comes from alternating study with conversation.”†

\* “Life and Letters,” i. 28.

† Ibid. i. 29.

He was rather older than the average undergraduate, and had been developed precociously by the unusual and varied course of his education. His naturally intense character had been deepened by an Evangelical training ; and the prospect of Ordination was kept steadily in view throughout his time at Oxford. Early in his residence he received an accident in his knee which prevented him from taking part in the athletic exercises which even in that simpler age played a great part in the life of the University. "He made but few friends ; but those whom he made he clung to tenaciously, and when the circle of his intimacies was completed he did not seek to enlarge it." He was, however, a member of the Union, and took part in its debates. It is recorded that on one occasion he spoke against



theatrical representations, and “was answered by MR. RUSKIN in a very ingenious and somewhat sarcastic speech, which excited much laughter in the room.” He sent in a poem for the Newdigate, but it was unsuccessful; read for a pass degree, and did so well that he was given an honorary fourth. All this is not impressive; but he did much solid reading, and laid a good foundation for much more. In one of his later letters he describes the Oxford system of education with deliberate approval, and opposes it to more pretentious but unsounder rivals.

“I do not give myself as a specimen, for my nervous energies are shattered by stump oratory, its excitements and reactions; but I know what reading is, for I could read once, and did. I read hard or not at all—never skimming—never turning



aside to merely inviting books; and Plato, Aristotle, Butler, Thucydides, Sterne, Jonathan Edwards have passed like the iron atoms of the blood into my mental constitution." \*

It is an odd collocation of authors, and very suggestive. The atmosphere of an University consumed by a furious controversy could hardly have assisted the studies of the undergraduates. Inevitably they echoed the shibboleths of their seniors, and added to the conflict the fire of their youth, the extravagance of their enthusiasm, and the boldness of their ignorance. Tractarianism did not succeed in capturing young ROBERTSON, though he might have seemed marked out by his Evangelical training and ardent temperament to be a follower of NEWMAN. Had this, indeed, been his fortune he would

\* "Life and Letters," ii. 209.

have renewed the brilliant yet melancholy tradition of RICHARD HURRELL FROUDE. He seems to have felt the attraction of the Movement. "My friends tell me," he writes in 1838, "I am on the high road to Puseyism, loving Plato, and reading Wordsworth." He piously ejaculates, *Μὴ γένοιτο!* and enlarges on "the donishness of Oxford, which insinuates its unlovely spirit everywhere." But the fierceness of his resentment may confess the strength of the attraction which he successfully resisted.

At the close of his academic career he writes to his father of "the paralysing effects of the Oxford delusion-heresy," and describes with indignation the spectacle of "promising and ardent men sinking one after another in a deadly torpor, wrapped up in self-contemplation, dead to their

Redeemer, and useless to His Church, under the baneful breath of this accursed upas tree."

In a letter written from Heidelberg at a time of spiritual crisis, he speaks of himself as one who had "walked with NEWMAN years ago to the brink of an awful precipice, and chosen rather to look upon it calmly, and know the worst of the secrets of the darkness, than recoil with NEWMAN, in fear and tenderness, back to the infallibility of Romanism." \*

From Oxford it is evident that ROBERTSON came away without its best gifts. He learned little : made few if any friends : and conceived a dislike of the place, which found frequent expression in later years. The almost personal affection which "that sweet city with her dreaming spires" has

\* "Life and Letters," i. 120.

moved in so many generations of Oxford men, and which draws them to it as by a spiritual magnet, found no place in his mind. The only memories which he retained of Oxford were those of a controversy which he disliked and despised. It is impossible to doubt that this was a very grave misfortune to him, and one for which he must himself be held partly responsible. "*With what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again*" is a pregnant saying which holds true of places and experiences, as well as of individuals.

For a short time ROBERTSON coexisted in Oxford with a very remarkable man, MARK PATTISON, whose character, in spite of its obvious contrasts, presents some features similar to his own. It would be true to say of the great Preacher what

LORD MORLEY has said of the great Scholar: "There was nobody in whose company one felt so much of the ineffable comfort of being quite safe against an attack of platitude."

PATTISON was three years senior to ROBERTSON, and must have passed at Oxford under very similar influences. He has left in his "Memoirs" a record of himself which may be compared with ROBERTSON'S self-revelation in his published "Letters." Both documents exhibit the almost morbid egotism of a generation which was sensitive, introspective, and self-conscious in a degree which we can hardly understand. MARK PATTISON'S account of his own religious development had a general resemblance to that of FREDERICK ROBERTSON, though in habit, and, to a less degree, in temperament

the two men were wide as the poles asunder—

“I seemed to my friends to have changed, to have gone over from High Anglicanism to Latitudinarianism, or Rationalism, or Unbelief, or whatever the term may be. This is not so : what took place with me was simple expansion of knowledge and ideas. To my home Puritan religion, almost narrowed to two points—fear of God’s wrath and faith in the doctrine of the atonement—the idea of the Church was a widening of the horizon which stirred up the spirit and filled it with enthusiasm. The notion of the Church soon expanded itself beyond the limits of the Anglican communion and became the wider idea of the Catholic Church. Then Anglicanism fell off from me, like an old garment, as Puritanism had done before.

“Now the idea of the Catholic Church is only a mode of conceiving the dealings of Divine Providence with the whole race of mankind. Reflection on the history and condition of humanity, taken as a whole, gradually convinced me that this theory of the relation of all living beings to the Supreme Being was too narrow



and inadequate. It makes an equal Providence, the Father of all, care only for a mere handful of the species, leaving the rest (such is the theory) to the chances of eternal misery. If God interferes at all to procure the happiness of mankind, it must be on a far more comprehensive scale than by providing for them a church of which far the majority of them will never hear. It was on this line of thought . . . that I passed out of the Catholic phase, but slowly, and in many years, to that highest development when all religions appear in their historical light, as efforts of the human spirit to come to an understanding with that Unseen Power whose pressure it feels, but whose motives are a riddle. Thus Catholicism dropped off me as another husk which I had outgrown. There was no conversion or change of view: I could no more have helped what took place within me than I could have helped becoming ten years older." \*

So runs the somewhat cold-blooded self-analysis of the Rector of LINCOLN, a

\* "Memoirs," p. 326 f.



learned recluse brooding over academic disappointments until he had soured himself irreparably. ROBERTSON was saved from this morose self-absorption and eclipse of faith by his more active career, by his domestic affections, and, above all, by his personal devotion to his Divine Master, but the process of intellectual widening and moral awakening, which went together in PARTISON's religious evolution, were present also in his. Tractarianism enlarged his mind, and detached his conscience from the narrow system of Evangelical theology ; and, though it never won his allegiance, it served to assist him into a larger catholicism than it could either include or tolerate. An observation of HENRY CRABB ROBINSON, entered in his Diary under the date October 23, 1846, when first he met

ROBERTSON at Heidelberg, sums up the great Preacher's attitude very justly, and discloses the process by which he reached it: "He is liberal in his opinions; and, though he is alarmed by the Puseyites, he seems to dislike the Evangelicals much more." \* It must always be remembered that ROBERTSON was not unconscious of a certain instability in his opinions. "He once said to a friend, who reported to me the incident," writes MR. FREDERICK ARNOLD in his discursive but informing book, "These are my present ideas; I am not quite sure what they will be next year." † It required more sympathy and

\* "Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson," iii. 281. Selected and edited by Thomas Sadler, Ph.D. (3 vols. London. 1869.)

† "Robertson of Brighton, with some notices of his Times and Contemporaries," p. 11. By the Rev. Frederick Arnold. (London. 1886.)

candour than the religious world, Tractarian and Evangelical, possessed sixty years ago to understand such speeches. ROBERTSON must, indeed, have been strangely perplexing to his religious contemporaries. There was something bizarre and volcanic about him, which startled and surprised even those who were his admirers and friends. "His very calm was a hurricane," said LADY BYRON, who knew him well. CÉSAR MALAN'S sombre view of the Christian minister's lot may strip his famous "prophecy" of any personal reference, but it is impossible to conceive of a juster summary of ROBERTSON'S career than that which he pronounced when he addressed his English visitor thus : "*Mon très cher frère, vous aurez une triste vie et un triste ministère.*" It is indeed an unhappy life, and an unhappy ministry,

which ROBERTSON'S loving and eloquent biographer records. But the unhappiness was due, less to the circumstances of his public work, than to the disease which wasted his body, and the fretful ardour which exhausted his mind. Something must also be attributed to the excitements of the time in which his ministry was fulfilled. Short of violent revolution (which England, almost alone of European countries, escaped), it is impossible to imagine a more strenuous time, more exacting in its demands, more wearing in its anxieties, than the six years, 1847 to 1853, of ROBERTSON'S ministry in Brighton.

His career as a clergyman falls into two well-defined divisions. From 1840, when he was ordained, and began work in a poor parish within the city of Winchester, to 1847, when he entered on his

duties as incumbent of Trinity Chapel, Brighton, ROBERTSON was engaged in the process of "finding himself" intellectually and religiously. Like most young clergymen who are worth anything, he started with gross mismanagement of himself, attempting the impossible by substituting enthusiasm for common sense, and assuming that excellence of purpose can atone for neglect of the laws of health. His health broke down, and he went abroad to recuperate. There he became engaged, and married in October, 1841. He returned to start work at Cheltenham, then and ever since a notable centre of Evangelicalism. He preached with power and acceptance, but soon became conscious that his points of view were changing, and that he could no longer go forward on the old lines.

MR. STOPFORD BROOKE'S account of his transition from Evangelicalism to a larger and more reasonable view of Christianity is illuminating—

“During this life at Cheltenham, his intellectual power became rapidly greater, in proportion as his individuality of character increased. As he freed himself from conventional forms of thought, he secured a mental grasp and vigour which he had not at Winchester. He began now to hew out his own path to his convictions. His continuous reading of Carlyle marks the state of intellectual ferment in which he now lived. ‘I have gained good and energy from that book,’ he says, speaking of ‘Past and Present.’ He read a great many historical books; and it is curious to find that, in preparing for his class on the books of Samuel, he had not recourse to commentaries, but to Niebuhr’s ‘Rome’ and Guizot’s work on civilisation, and to books on political economy. Tennyson and Dante seem to have been the poets whom he chiefly read, though his reading of this class of literature must have been large, since the



lectures on poetry which he delivered at Brighton were first delivered, though not so fully, at Cheltenham. Dante he seems to have read every day, and to have committed the whole of the 'Inferno' to memory during 1845. German metaphysics took up some of his time, and usefully. He had the rare power of extracting out of them what was practical, and of rejecting, while his subtle intellect played with pleasurable, their fine woven gossamer of ideas. He still kept up his early interest in scientific pursuits, especially chemistry; and relieved his leisure with the study of physical geography. He had a useful habit of reading on the questions of the day. When the Maynooth grant was being contested, he made notes of all the debates, and read, in order to form a clear opinion, Burke on the Irish Laws, Lingard, and Hallam. This was his constant practice; and owing to it he was always ready with a well-considered view of all the subjects which had agitated the country during his career."\*

"Honest doubt" received scant respect

\* "Life and Letters," i. 97.



from believers of any school in that polemical generation, and we are not surprised to learn that ROBERTSON'S change of opinion was resented by his friends. Resigning his curacy at Cheltenham, he went abroad to think things out in a freer and less controversial atmosphere than that of England. For awhile he ministered with much success to the English colony at Heidelberg, read widely, and observed intelligently. Then, refusing the request of the Heidelberg congregation that he should become their regular pastor, he returned to England, and was directed by BISHOP WILBERFORCE, for whose guidance he had asked, to the poor parish of S. Ebbe's in the city of Oxford.\* Here he made a very promising

\* "The Bishop acted liberally in regard to the Oxford church. Before undertaking it, Robertson frankly told

start, but had hardly "got into his stride" before he was invited by the Trustees to become the minister of the proprietary chapel of Holy Trinity in Brighton. At first he declined the proposal, but when it was repeated, he referred the matter to the Bishop, and on his advice accepted it.

With his arrival in Brighton begins the second and more famous period of his ministry. On August 15, 1847, he preached his first sermon in Brighton, and thus began the six-years' ministry of preaching which has left a permanent mark on English religion, and made his name a "household word" in the Churches of the English-speaking communities all over the world. He had

him his views on the question of baptism, and the Bishop took no umbrage, but said he liked a difference of opinion on some points."—Robinson's "Diary," iii. 299.

come through his perplexities: he had shaken off the chains of party: he had perceived a truer path, and chosen it: he had realised the nature and direction of his destiny. Henceforth his name would be indissolubly associated with Brighton.\*

\* The following extract from ROBINSON'S "Diary," iii. 300, gives a description of ROBERTSON at the beginning of his career in Brighton, drawn from life by an acute, interested, and not unsympathetic observer:—

"23rd October. The only incident belonging properly to Brighton has been my finding settled here, as incumbent of one of the Chapels of Ease, the MR. ROBERTSON of whom you will find an account in my letter written from Heidelberg when I was last there,—the eloquent preacher, who delivered a remarkable discourse in favour of the Irish. He is a most liberal man; so liberal that I must apply to him the words he has used of DR. CHANNING, of whose writings he is a great admirer: 'I wonder how he can believe so much, and not believe more'; only substituting 'disbelieve' or 'doubt' for 'believe.' I repeated to him yesterday words which I had uttered to DR. ARNOLD, 'I am as convinced as a man can be on any matter of speculation, that the orthodox doctrines, *as*

We can picture him from the descriptions of his friends. A tall man, rather spare and very active, wrapped in a soldier's cloak, and striding through the streets with eager rapid steps. His countenance, handsome but stern and even severe, would light up joyously at sight of a friend. He was "an incessant

*vulgarly understood*, are false; but I have never ventured to deny that possibly there is an important truth at the bottom of every one of those doctrines of which they are a misrepresentation.' He interposed between the first and second part of this assertion, 'And so am I'; and he said nothing when I concluded. He might have said, and I am perplexed that he did not, 'I go further than saying it is possible; I have no doubt that they all are substantially true'; but he did not. This ROBERTSON has already made a sensation, and is popular. He says his popularity cannot last. He has already driven away some High Church ladies—no men; and he preached last Sunday in favour of the Irish, and against the Protestant English, in a way that must have given great offence. He will be a powerful rival to SORTAINE." SORTAINE was a very popular and eloquent preacher in LADY HUNTINGDON'S Chapel at Brighton.

walker," and as he walked he thought incessantly, voraciously. Sometimes, we are assured, "he would wander for hours at night, and even for the whole night through." In those lonely and unresting vigils he conceived and shaped the discourses which were to hold his congregations spell-bound, and in years to come command the study of countless thousands. He loved flowers, and birds, and children, and the open sea. The country fed his mind, and soothed his spirits. He combined the artist's vision with the poet's fancy, and uttered both in sentences so lucid, strong, and moving, that they seem the absolutely fitting vehicle of the thoughts they enshrine. It is much to say, but not too much, that the author of these Letters and Sermons, if he had devoted himself to literature, would have been

among the first writers of a generation which included NEWMAN, RUSKIN, THACKERAY, the two FROUDES, and DEAN CHURCH. "He had no ear for music," resembling DEAN STANLEY in that respect, but, "like many who have no ear for music, he was acutely conscious of the melody of ordered words." His letters are filled with allusions to the scenes in which he lived. If he suffered from the sectarian bitterness of Brighton society, he found rest and comfort, inspiration and power, in Brighton's natural beauties of sea and land. "It has always been so," he writes, "when I have not *perfect* union with humanity, I find in trees and clouds, and forms and colours of things inanimate, more that is congenial, more that I can inform with my own being, more that speaks to me than in my own species."



With all his depth and richness of sympathy ROBERTSON was an intensely proud man. He resented criticism, and disliked compliments. His position as the incumbent of a proprietary chapel exposed him to a kind of patronage from approving seat-holders which hurt and humiliated him. He had a short way with persons whom he suspected of can't : and we gather from his published letters that these were numerous and persistent. He was extremely sensitive and nervous : his health was wretched : and the strain of extemporaneous preaching induced violent reactions in which he was wont to express himself extravagantly. All this has to be remembered when we read his Letters. There is something morbid about his constant and vehement expressions of disgust and dislike of preaching,



his often reiterated conviction of failure, his severe judgments of parties and movements which he disapproved. He was sick and over-wrought, and he died at 37.

The combination of such reckless courage and such robust common sense is unusual and even piquant. The fervour of the martyr went along in him with the cold reasonableness of the philosopher. He was at once an enthusiast and a practical man, a loftily spiritual preacher and a keen sportsman, a fierce advocate for social justice, and a relentless critic of popular aspirations, the least insular and the most patriotic of English preachers, the most virile of thinkers and the most sensitive of men. It was the union of so many contradictions in the complex whole of a single character that

fascinated and alienated at the same time, raised expectations and disappointed them, invited supporters and repelled them.

His very charity had in it a touch of superiority which exasperated the partisans whom he aspired to conciliate. He approved the Gorham judgment, but was at some pains to make clear to the world that he regarded with impartial disapproval both the Calvinist parson and the Tractarian bishop. This attitude of "a plague on both your houses" may be reasonable but it is not conciliatory ; and, though ROBERTSON was entirely sincere in his belief that he was a peacemaker, it may be doubted whether his pacific method was not even more exasperating than that of the normal controversialist. On this point CAMPBELL of Row, a man

in some respects not unlike ROBERTSON, has some acute observations—

“ His [ROBERTSON’S] *catholicity* was a genuine catholicity, while its practical issue—its necessary issue—was isolation and solitariness, for men will not accept our acknowledgment of the good we see in them while we separate it from forms of thought with which they themselves identify it. It is too like a compliment to the heart at the expense of the head. More especially will they not accept it when they know that we make the same analysis, with the same result of partial recognition, in the case of others in whom *they* see no good.” \*

In 1852 the policy of NAPOLEON III. aroused much alarm in England. It was widely suspected that the French Emperor meditated an attack on this country. ROBERTSON shared this fear, and expressed himself in words which are

\* “Memorials of John McLeod Campbell,” vol. ii.  
109.

capable of useful application to the situation to-day, when, not France, but Germany is the national enemy. He was addressing a public audience in Brighton in February, 1852—

“Thus much I will dare to say. If a foreign foot be planted in our sacred soil—if the ring of the rifle of the Chasseurs de Vincennes be heard upon these shores, terrible as the first reverses might be, when discipline could be met only by raw enthusiasm—thanks to gentlemen who have taught us the sublime mysteries of capital in lieu of the old English superstitions of Honour and Religion, they may yet chance to learn that British chivalry did not breathe her last at Moodkee, or Ferozeshah, or Sobraon, or Goojerat, or Meeanee, or Hyderabad. They may yet be taught that there is something beyond the raw hysterics of a transient excitement in the spirit of self-sacrifice which we have learned from our Master’s Cross. They may yet discover that amongst the artisans, and peasants,

and working men of England, there are a thousand thousand worthy to be brothers of those eleven who sleep beneath the rocks of Trukkee, with the red thread of Honour round their wrists." \*

ROBERTSON was no vulgar fire-eater, but a firm and devoted patriot—

"I cannot agree with you," he writes to a friend in 1852, "in wishing for a war. It is very horrible, and though I think there is nothing of personal danger in it that appals, the thought of what would befall our *women* gives me many a sleepless night. I expect an invasion; nevertheless, I detest war. But Mr. Cobden and Co.'s doctrines prostitute national honour to 'the wealth of nations,' and have left us unable to defend ourselves or even to arm our soldiers as well as savages can afford to arm themselves." †

I think there can be little doubt as to the course which ROBERTSON would have

\* "Life and Letters," ii. 90, 91.

† Ibid. ii. 120.

pursued with respect to the great war in which we are now involved. His feelings in view of BELGIUM and SERBIA, to which we must now add MONTENEGRO, would be sufficiently expressed in such a vigorous and characteristic sentence as this: "I am still in many cases for the Christian virtue of an English oak stick, with an English hand to lay it on, and show mercy when you have done justice."\* He feared the approach of an universal war in which the whole character of civilisation would be brought into jeopardy. We have lived to see the fulfilment of his worst fears.

"How devoutly it is to be hoped that, in the coming conflict of the nations, America and England will stand side by side, instead of opposite; for if not, it will

\* "Life and Letters," ii. 51.



be all over with the cause of liberty, for some centuries at least. The conqueror in the strife will be then a military power, and must perforce crush the peoples under a tyranny. And as to a universal war, that is inevitable, and in every direction men's minds are foreboding it. . . . I am told that the Ministry are full of apprehensions, and that even the late Cabinet would have taken much more decisive measures but for their fear of that infatuated Manchester Peace School. Strange, that, people with so much to lose in case of war should be so blindly unwilling to pay in the present for the means of peace!" \*

So wrote ROBERTSON in 1852, having France in his view as the national enemy. Had he been living to-day, the direction of his warnings and protests would have been altered, but not their spirit or their substance. Even then his prophetic eye perceived "the cloud no bigger than a

\* Ibid. ii. 151, 152.

man's hand" rising in the direction of Germany. In a letter written during his visit to the continent in 1846, occurs this ominous passage: "You cannot imagine how England is detested throughout Germany. The *Allgemeine Zeitung*, the leading newspaper, is perpetually attacking us." \* We are now reaping the harvest of that malignant sowing.

ROBERTSON was a quixotically honest man. He would not be taken for what he was not, or accept applause which he knew or suspected to have been given him on a misunderstanding of his real intention. This, I think, is the true explanation of his frequently expressed disgust of the preacher's work. He hated the inevitable posing: the facile emotion: the cheaply earned reputation for saintliness:

\* "Life and Letters," ii. 276.

the lavish compliment, even the gross flattery, which pertain to the rôle of the fashionable preacher. "I cannot say how humiliated I feel at degenerating into the popular preacher of a fashionable watering-place." \* Again : "Would to God I were not a mere pepper-cruet to give a relish to the palates of the Brightonians!" † "I wish I did not hate preaching so much, but the degradation of being a Brighton preacher is almost intolerable." ‡ More calmly he writes: "I see what rhetoric does, and what it seems to do, and I thoroughly despise it. I think it makes people worse instead of better; exposes the feelings to tension, like the pulling constantly of a spring back, until the spring loses its elasticity, becomes weak,

\* Ibid. ii. 188.

† Ibid. ii. 28.

‡ Ibid. ii. 59.

or breaks; and yet, perhaps, I do it injustice: with an unworldly noble love to give it reality, what might it not do?"\* The root of such outbursts lay in the repugnance of a sensitively sincere nature against the conditions of such preaching as his at that time and place.

BISHOP THIRLWALL'S observation is just and acute: "It is altogether a melancholy and really tragic history; for one cannot help seeing that the very same elements in his constitution, mental and physical, which gave his mind its peculiar energy, also created the moodiness which embittered, darkened, and shortened his life. The sphere in which he moved was really one in which he was at least as useful, and might have been as happy, as in any other, if he could only have seen it in

\* "Life and Letters," i. 330.

its true light."\* HORT, writing to a friend in 1866, expresses himself in similar terms. "ROBERTSON had," he says, "like every one else, some flaws of character. Bodily constitution (and other causes which MR. BROOKE no doubt does right in concealing) give him a morbid fondness for dark views of everything. Also his total want of humour marks a really important narrowness of temperament; his seriousness would gain, not lose, by some relief. But this amounts only to saying that he was not perfect. . . . Certainly he looked at the outer world, both of Brighton and of England generally, through strangely clouded spectacles."† "I think," writes a personal friend, "a touch of geniality or of sensuousness

\* "Letters to a Friend," p. 63.

† Hort's "Life and Letters," vol. ii. p. 68.

would have improved his character ; but perhaps my materialistic tendency misleads me there, and a tinge of asceticism may be a necessary element in all apostleship." \* At this distance of time these faults of temperament have a trivial aspect, and do not detract from the nobility of the man himself, but they seemed more considerable in the eyes of contemporaries, who had other and graver reasons for disliking him. Quixotic honesty is the reason of his steady refusal to "run in harness," perhaps it were truer to say, his constitutional inability to do so. He was provokingly, almost grotesquely, conscientious. He would insist on careful explanations when the one thing needful seemed to be unity of action. Gradually men learned to value

\* "Life and Letters," vol. ii. p. 302.



his approval the more for its deliberately scrupulous character, but at first they were moved to surprise and even resentment. When the shop-assistants of Brighton set on foot an agitation for earlier closing, ROBERTSON approved cordially and supported openly; but he chose the opportunity of the public meeting which inaugurated the movement to point out the special circumstances which made early closing difficult in Brighton, and to lecture the ardent agitators on their tendency to misuse such leisure as they already had. Take again his attitude towards the rising movement of the Christian Socialists, which MAURICE and KINGSLEY were then organising. His sympathies were certainly with them; his personal assistance would have been welcome, but he seemed far more anxious

to dissociate himself from the Socialistic tendencies than to strengthen the Christian effort. Partly, no doubt, this was due to his clearer intelligence, and juster prevision; but mainly it expressed the almost morbid conscientiousness of his character. He had, moreover, the fastidious temperament of an artist, and the haughty aloofness of an aristocrat. He disliked the violence and coarseness of popular agitation, and shrank from it; but his conscience was active and inexorable, and he could not stomach the cant of a sentimentalism which ignored or defended injustice. Thus he approved the objects, while he loathed the methods, of democracy.

“There was a kind of double nature in him,” observes his biographer. “He was instinctively a Tory, but he was by

conviction a Liberal."\* "My tastes are with the aristocrat, my principles with the mob," he said himself. His opinions were always his own, deliberately formed on the basis of his own knowledge and reflection. Accordingly he was never wholly accordant with any prevailing tendency. He agreed and disagreed at the same time, treading a middle path along which partisans of any kind would not follow. "The result was, that speaking at one time like a Liberal, and at another like a Conservative, he was misunderstood, and reckoned an enemy by the extreme spirits of both parties. He saw the truth itself of the question, while they wished him only to see the half truths which they held. He met the fate of those who are beyond their time."†

\* "Life and Letters," i. 148.

† Ibid. i. 150.

No party could make him out then : no party can make use of him now. Neither the Tractarian nor the Evangelical escaped the lash of his rebuke : both have come to regard him with a respect which is not without an element of magnanimity.

His social sympathies were strong, and his political interests keen. " Whatever was agitating society he took up either in the pulpit or on the platform, or in conversation with his friends." \* In fact, like the Presbyterians of Scotland among whom LEIGHTON passed a troubled experience, he " preached to the times." He had no mind for the patristic studies of the Tractarian, or the futile dogmatism of the Evangelical. " I do not read the Fathers," he wrote, adding that he " knew

\* " Life and Letters," i. 160,

their system pretty well from having examined with great interest their advocates' and their opponents' writings."\*

"I mix little with the religious world, and so avoid discussion. I read little of divinity, much more of literature."†

The aloofness of his habit assisted the distinctiveness of his style. He was athirst for reality, and panted as one asphyxiated in the atmosphere of petty controversy in which perforce he lived. After narrating some episodes of the Kaffir War, he observes enviously: "The risk and excitement are more real than the being badgered by old maids of both sexes in a place like Brighton." Now, that is not precisely a clergyman's manner of speaking, but it is natural to a man, who habitually avoided the normal

\* Ibid. i. 178.

† Ibid. ii. 44.

clergyman's reading, and immersed himself in secular literature and secular interests. Perhaps the secret of ROBERTSON'S influence over many who lay outside the recognised membership of the Churches arose in no slight measure from the absence of conventional clerical modes of thought and speech in his sermons, and this circumstance did but reflect his own ordinary habit. He was an earnestly religious man, the farthest removed possible from the shallow, half-cynical indifferentism which we associate with the notion of "a man of the world," but politically and ecclesiastically he was an incorrigible mugwump, and he lived in an age when party spirit ran high, and when all partisans agreed in hating and hunting mugwumps. The frenzies of party burn themselves out, and as men contemplate



the ashes of conflict, they wonder at the fierceness of the flames and the completeness of their extinction. But the unheeded or resented protests of the mugwump are in the sequel seen to express the core of the controversies, and to disclose the surviving truth of the conflicting errors. There is a great reversal of parts. In the retrospect the figures which filled the stage shrink into insignificance, and the relatively powerless factor, which they swept from sight, takes the central place. Who remembers now the busy critics who worried the great Preacher's spirit, and shadowed his life? If the names of opponents survive, they do so in connexion with his name. For they, and all they stood for, have been submerged by the wave of newer interests, "snowed under" by the advance of the

race, while their victim lives, and shall ever live, by the title of those unchanging and fundamental truths to which he gave his heart and uttered his witness. Let me end by reading a paragraph from a letter belonging to the year 1849, when ROBERTSON of Brighton was at the summit of his power and influence, and which may serve as a confession of his personal faith, and at the same time as an authoritative commentary on his ministry—

“To live by trust in GOD—to do and say the right because it is lovely—to dare to gaze on the splendour of naked truth, without putting a false veil before it to terrify children and old women by mystery and vagueness, to live by love, and not by fear, that is the life of a true, brave man, who will take CHRIST and his mind for the Truth, instead of the clamour of either the worldly world or the religious world : between which two, alas ! there is as little difference now as in the days of

Pharisaism; or rather, if there be any difference, we know who said that the 'world' of sinners was, as knowing its blindness, rather in the less danger of the two." \*

\* "Life and Letters," i. 174.



SERMON

PREACHED IN S. MARGARET'S, WESTMINSTER

ON THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

FEBRUARY 6, 1916, AT MATTINS





## A GOOD SOLDIER OF JESUS CHRIST

1. EVEN in the midst of the anxieties and distractions of a great war it may be worth our while to recall the memory of one who, though his life was brief and troubled, and his ministry relatively obscure, has wielded an influence wider and more beneficent than perhaps has belonged to any preacher of our National Church. On February 3, 1816, FREDERICK WILLIAM ROBERTSON was born in London, and last week the centenary of his birth was observed in the place with which his name will always be associated. "ROBERTSON *of Brighton*" is now a familiar and venerated religious teacher,

whose posthumously published sermons are still widely read both in England and in America, and whose distinctive ideas, points of view, and methods of expression, have so passed into the "use and wont" of modern Christians of all types and parties, that it were scarcely excessive to say that no religious work is now issued from the press which does not bear the mark of his mind. I shall take leave on this occasion to consider the manner of his preaching, and to suggest the reasons of his great and continuing influence. If by so doing I could lead some of my older hearers to renew their acquaintance with those astonishing discourses, and could persuade those who belong to a younger generation, less familiar perhaps with ROBERTSON'S name, to become themselves students of his works, I shall have more

than justified my choice of subject, and atoned for my demand on your ever-courteous attention.

2. My choice of text is soon explained. When ROBERTSON was ordained on Sunday, July 12, 1840, the BISHOP OF WINCHESTER, on presenting his papers to him, gave him as a motto the text from which the Ordination sermon had been preached, "*Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ,*" and I have taken from it the phrase, "*A good soldier of Jesus Christ,*" as giving a description, which is almost a portrait, of the great Preacher. The natural ardour of his character, and the bent of his early inclinations, went along with the tradition of a military ancestry, and an upbringing among soldiers, to stamp on his career a certain aspect which can hardly be called anything else than martial. The fact that

he had declined a Commission in the 3rd Dragoon Guards, in order to pursue the career of a clergyman, seemed to give him, so he allowed himself to think, a special responsibility in respect to soldiers. The military touch is perceptible in his letters and sermons. He is best understood as "*A good soldier of Jesus Christ.*"

3. Every man's influence is determined, to an extent which it is difficult to overstate, by the nature of the times in which he lives, and by the situation in which he is actually placed. His achievements must always be conditioned by his opportunities, and the manner of his service will be but partially under his own control. ROBERTSON'S ministry only extended over a period of thirteen years, from 1840 to 1853, and his work at Brighton (which alone made him famous) lasted for no

more than six years. On August 15, 1847, he preached his first sermon as minister of Holy Trinity, a proprietary chapel in Brighton, and on the same day, August 15, 1853, he died. The middle of the XIXth century was a troubled epoch throughout Europe, for the reaction and exhaustion which had followed the Napoleonic wars had spent themselves, and men were everywhere awakening once more to the consciousness of rights and powers. Here in England the violent revolutions which broke out on the continent were avoided, but society was profoundly disturbed by political agitation, by economic transition, by acute ecclesiastical controversy, by theological innovation following upon amazing scientific advances. The greater lights of the Victorian Age were shining in the

heavens. Men were excited and exalted by the rise and fall of the Tractarian Movement. Socialism was raising its head, and beginning to take a place in English public life, which has since acquired a significant importance. A dangerous cleavage was revealing itself between the artisans of the great towns and the middle classes, which then "called the tune" in English politics. Christianity, too closely connected with the middle classes, was in danger of being compromised by their distinctive faults and failures. The Tractarian Movement was still academic and aristocratic, but the débacle at Oxford was already leading to popular developments which have since attained vast dimensions. "Ritualism," with its zeal and its anarchy, its curious individualism of method and its



developments of crude superstition, was still in its infancy. The popular feeling was intensely, almost brutally, Protestant. "No Popery" was a formula which could convulse the nation, and upset Governments. It was an age of popular preachers, of ardent and unwearying controversy, of bitter religious feuds, of theological rancour, of cruel judgments. Meanwhile, the nation was becoming very wealthy. A hungry materialism went along with an exorbitant national vanity. Englishmen were winning on the continent that reputation for arrogance and ostentation which still lingers. We must have this conditioning background of the age in mind if we would appreciate the nature of ROBERTSON'S work, and the measure of his success.

4. Into this flourishing and fanatical

society of middle-class England ROBERTSON brought an influence, original, virile, lofty, which had no parallel at the time, and which even now, when his characteristic contributions to religious thought have been very generally assimilated, preserves a distinctive quality. His courage was superb. He fought the reigning prejudices singlehanded, and he fought "to a finish." Sabbatarianism, the "No Popery" cry, the crude Evangelical soteriology, the selfish class prejudice which underlay the clamour against "Socialism," the shameless partisanship, the fanatical Bibliolatry—all found in him an opponent, whose almost prophetic vehemence went always along with an intellectual superiority which was as evident as it was disconcerting. In spite of the fact that his sermons were unwritten, and had to be

prepared for publication from notes taken by a member of his congregation, and some recollections of his words which he himself dictated, they are marked by a nobility of phrase, a moral passion, and an intellectual force which are amazing and, I think, unparalleled.

5. In the hands of that Bibliolatrous generation the Bible had become the victim of arbitrary dogmatism, and men's intelligence was insulted by fantastic interpretations which failed to satisfy their hearts. ROBERTSON read the Scriptures, and expounded them, always with direct and professed reference to the situation by which he was actually confronted, and he was rescued from artificiality and anachronism by his clear insight into the principles underlying human action in every age, and by his robust indifference

to social forms and fashions. He lived before the emergence of "Biblical criticism" as we know it now, but he made himself familiar with contemporary science, and brought his knowledge frankly into his preaching. This frankness and actuality were as novel as they were welcome. His "Expository Lectures" on the Epistles to the Corinthians might have been entitled "Tracts for the Times" far more justly than the archaic polemical publications which passed under that description. Take, as a sufficient illustration of his method, the comment which he makes on S. PAUL's challenge, "*What part hath he that believeth with an infidel?*"—

"There is much danger, however, in applying this law. It is perilous work when men begin to decide who are believers and who are not, if they decide by party badges. A man worships in a

certain congregation, is taught by a certain minister, does not subscribe to certain societies ; whereupon by that which arrogates to itself the title of the 'religious world,' he is at once pronounced an unbeliever, and not a Christian. This spirit besets our age, it is rife in this town, and demands the earnest protest of lip and life from every true man. For nothing more surely eats out the heart of religion, which is love, than this spirit of religious exclusiveness, and of judging others. Nothing more surely brings out the natural, innate popery of the heart. Better, far better than this, is it to risk the charge, falsely brought, which CHRIST endured, of being worldly, '*A friend of publicans and sinners.*' . . . Beneath the Quaker's sober, unworldly garb, there *may* be the canker of the love of gain ; and beneath the guise of peace there may be the combative spirit, which is worse than war. Nor can you get rid of worldliness by placing a ban on particular places of entertainment, and particular societies. The world is a spirit rather than a form ; and just as it is true that wherever two or three are met together in His Name, GOD is in the midst

of them, so, if your heart be at one with His Spirit, you *may* in the midst of worldly amusements—yet not without great danger, for you will have multiplied temptations—keep yourself unspotted from the world.”

Such language is not unusual now; then it was startlingly novel.

6. ROBERTSON attracted men, who found no help in the current religion, by his resolute refusal to accept the conventional religious phrases at face value. The fashionable Protestant doctrine of the Atonement was to him a “Shylock-like affair” which might be actually demoralising to those who held it—

“The Protestant penitent,” he said, “*if* the system succeeds, repents in his arm-chair, and does no noble deed such as boundless love could alone aspire; he reforms, and is very glad that broken-hearted remorse is distrust of God, becomes a prosaic Pharisee, and patronises missionary societies, and is all safe,



which is the one great point in his religion."

I have quoted from one of his letters, but the freedom and force of the language are as great in the sermons. His robust common sense was the more welcome since it coexisted in him with an ardent enthusiasm, and a delicately discriminating sympathy. The combination is as unusual as it is fascinating. Men were perplexed and attracted at the same time. Few could really understand him; many misunderstood him grossly. It is truer of him than of most men to say that he was before his time, suggesting points of view which the next generation would adopt, and providing formulæ which would become the watch-words of future faith. Naturally, therefore, he was a solitary figure in his own

day, oppressed by a sense of loneliness which saddened and almost crushed his sensitive spirit. The religious society of the time, absorbed in matters which seemed to him trivial, tiresome, and futile beyond endurance, could neither comfort nor assist him. He turned from it with a disgust which sometimes found vehement expression. Taking up a frankly external position, which amazed and exasperated partisans of every kind, he examined and affected to explain the doctrines and practices about which they contended so fiercely: "I have almost done with divinity," he writes,—“dogmatic divinity, that is—except to lovingly endeavour to make out the truth which lies beneath this or that poor dogma, miserably overlaid as marble fonts are with whitewash.” \*

\* "Life and Letters," i. 181.

Such a handling of current beliefs may be extremely helpful to disinterested or distressed inquirers, but to eager devotees it must needs appear little better than a blend of insolence and profaneness; and the bold thinker who dares thus to provoke the resentment of conflicting zealots will learn to his cost that the last thing that controversialists desire is such an explanation of their respective claims as shall put an end to conflict. The Peace-maker is likely to appear the most contentious figure of all, as was the case with S. PAUL, who is none the less the author of the XIIIth Chapter of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians. This was, precisely, ROBERTSON'S fate. When, like MOSES, he *appeared to his brethren as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are*

*brethren ; why do ye wrong one to another ? he experienced the same repulse, " He that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us ? Wouldest thou kill me as thou killedst the Egyptian yesterday ? "*

The applause of the non-religious public did not recommend ROBERTSON'S suggestions to the zealots of the Churches. After two generations we can see how right he was, but at the time, human nature being what it is, we cannot wonder that he was the mark of general dislike among religious people.

7. What, we must ask, was, and is, the secret of ROBERTSON'S astonishing influence ? Something must certainly be attributed to the style of his sermons. His deliberate abstinence from those studies—theological, patristic, controversial

— which are professedly and professionally clerical, saved him from the conventional and semi-technical language which alienates educated laymen; while his exact and extensive knowledge of the Bible—it is on record that in view of his Ordination “he literally learnt by heart the whole of the New Testament, not only in English but in Greek”—gave a devoutness and dignity to his discourses which conciliated English piety, always formed and fed by the Biblical tradition of the Puritans. Something is to be allowed for the directness and vivacity of the style, the effect not only of his eager and brilliant mind, but also of his extemporaneous method, to which also must be ascribed the complete absence of the quotations which so often find a place in written sermons. Mainly, however, I

incline to think that the explanation of ROBERTSON'S influence is to be found in three facts: first, the deliberate reference of his preaching to modern conditions of thought and life; next, the intensely personal note which runs through his preaching; finally, and principally, the passionate devotion to the Person of the LORD JESUS CHRIST which inspires his words.

8. It is much, perhaps too much, to say of any man, however pure in character and devoted in life, that he was like the Perfect SAVIOUR, Whose tender yet austere Figure faces us in the Gospels: and yet there are traits in ROBERTSON which suggest to the considering student that he was in some sense fitly described as *CHRIST-like*. To those who knew him best, his passionate affection for his



LORD impressed them as the key to his whole ministry. "I am not fulsome in my language of him," writes one who had known him well, "when I say that the spirit of CHRIST saturated everything he said and did. For my own part, I have never learnt so much of the mind of CHRIST, and what is meant by following CHRIST, as from him. Like his *MASTER* (as he fearlessly loved to call the SAVIOUR, in whatever company he was), he had two distinct sides to his character. . . . There was a *daring* in him to speak what he was persuaded was truth, which was quite unsubject to the good or bad opinions of the world. Yet this fearlessness was always governed by a most *generous* charity." \*

There is, we know well, a strange

\* "Life and Letters," ii. 306.

power in the deepest affection to transform the lover into the likeness of the Beloved: and ROBERTSON'S affection for JESUS CHRIST was profound, passionate, and pervading. The Glory of "THE SON OF MAN" had flashed on his darkness as he in his turn had traversed the night of doubt, and It had brought his tortured spirit into the haven of unclouded faith. "The one great certainty to which, in the midst of the darkest doubt, I never ceased to cling," he says, was "the entire symmetry and loveliness and the unequalled nobleness of the humanity of the SON OF MAN."\* In HIS light he saw light. The enormous popularity of the book, "Ecce Homo," published many years after ROBERTSON'S death, and, through the medium of a

\* "Life and Letters," i. 289.

kindred mind, reflecting very impressively his point of view, may assist us to understand how welcome to troubled minds was this version of Christianity, which having passed behind the veils of theology, and ignored the pretensions of the Churches, placed men in presence of the MASTER Himself.

9. This lay at the root of his all-embracing charity. "I love to feel the oneness of feeling which pervades the Sons of GOD amidst vitally opposed Communions," he wrote in 1841, when his ministry was beginning, and the note of oneness in CHRIST was sustained in waxing emphasis until the end. This intimate and governing relation to the MASTER made him searchingly sceptical of external systems, which, under authority of the MASTER'S Name, came between men and

HIS Personal Claim. His quarrel with his religious contemporaries, Tractarian and Evangelical, turned on this point. Their systems, ecclesiastical, sacramental, and theological, disciplines of asceticism and "schemes of salvation," cheated men with the delusion that they could be Christians by some other title than that of personal discipleship. "Anything but CHRIST—the Virgin, the Church, the sacraments, a new set of our own resolutions; any or all of these will the heart embrace as a means to holiness or acceptance rather than GOD'S way. You may even persuade men to give up their sins if they may do it without CHRIST; as teetotalism can witness." \*

This personal devotion to the MASTER is the secret of persistence which

\* "Life and Letters," i. 79.

ROBERTSON'S sermons possess. They do not grow obsolete, or fall out of relevance to human life, precisely because they are so closely knit to that element which, alone of all the constituents of the Christian religion, defies Time, and the change of circumstances, and the pressure of new rivals. "*Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, to-day, yea and for ever,*" and Christianity, just in measure as it preserves its true character of a personal union with JESUS CHRIST, shares this Divine persistence. Everything else passes—creeds, forms of order, liturgical fashions, conventional standards of morality, social systems. For these are the creatures of human circumstance, find their title in congruity with human needs, have their strength in serving human interests, lose their hold when human life

has been swept on the advancing tide of history away from its old moorings. One thing remains unaltered and unalterable. It is the approach of GOD to the spirit of Man, and the answer of Man to the Spirit of GOD. Of that high and ineffable intercourse the visible sacrament and the eternal symbol is the historic JESUS, Whose Character is disclosed in the gospel, and Whose Example is the beacon of mankind. Let me end by reading a passage from one of his later letters, which forms an impressive summary of his witness—

“Men try, you say, to find resting-places for Faith in Reason, rather than for Reason in Faith. If there has been a single principle which I have taught more emphatically than any other, it is that not by reason—meaning, by reason, the understanding—but by the spirit, that is the



heart, trained in meekness and love by God's Spirit, truth can be judged of at all. I hold that the attempt to rest Christianity upon miracles and fulfilments of prophecy is essentially the vilest rationalism ; as if the trained intellect of a lawyer, which can investigate evidence, were that to which is trusted the soul's salvation ; or, as if the evidence of the senses were more sure than the intuitions of the spirit to which spiritual truths almost *alone* appeal. It is not in words (though they are constant), but in the deepest convictions and first principles of my soul, that I feel the failure of intellect in this matter. Indeed, the common complaint against me is, that I make too little of the proofs addressed to the understanding. I complain of Evangelicalism because it tries to explain the Atonement by Reason—a debtor's and creditor's account. As to the desire after breadth and comprehension, that I confess. I am sick of hatred, suspicion, slander, and condemnation of one another, and long to believe in men's good rather than in their evil, in God rather than in the devil. I believe I hold 'the distinctive features of my religion' sharply enough, too sharply for a great many people ; but



I cannot, and will not judge those who do not hold them as I do ; nay, I go further, I will not cease trying to love them, and believing that, under other words, they often express the truths that I hold most dear. To the question, Who is my neighbour ? I reply, as my Master did, by the example that He gave, ‘ The alien and the heretic.’ And I do not think that He will say my charity is too large, or my inclusiveness too great. Alas ! alas ! when I see Romanists cursing the Church of England, Evangelicals shaking their heads about the Christianity of Tractarians, Tractarians banning Dissenters, Dissenters anathematising Unitarians, and Unitarians of the old school condemning the more spiritual ones of the new ; I am forced to hope that there is more inclusiveness in the Love of God than in the bitter orthodoxy of sects and churches. I find only two classes who roused His divine indignation when on earth ; those who excluded bitterly—the Scribes, and those of a religious name—the popular religious party of the day, who judged frailty and error bitterly—the Pharisees. I am certain that I do not ‘ dilute ’ truth, at least what I count truth, nor hold lax

views about opinions ; but I am certain that men are often better than their creed, and that Our LORD's mode of judging the tree by its fruits is the only true one." \*

\* "Life and Letters," ii. 149, 150.



## APPENDIX



## I

THE present incumbent of Holy Trinity, Brighton, gives the following sketch of the history of the proprietary chapel in which Robertson fulfilled his ministry.

It was built in 1817 by Thomas Read Kemp, Esq., then Lord of the Manor of Brighton and a Dissenter. Mr. Kemp himself officiated, though it was commonly asserted that "he could not preach, whatever else he might be able to do." Seeing that Union Chapel, Meeting House Lane, was only about 50 yards away, and that that chapel had been in existence since 1688, it appears that Mr. Kemp's dissent was of that radical kind which finds even established nonconformity unpalatable. But this rigour was short-lived, and Mr. Kemp soon found peace in the Established Church together with a seat in the House of Commons, and Trinity Chapel knew him no more. He was succeeded by "Lawyer" Faithfull, who took over the building and administered it as a Dissenting Chapel, he himself preaching in it. It must have been a curious

building, with its domestic unpretending front, and its galleries on all four sides; the central internal feature seems to have been a much-admired pulpit "resembling a huge *vase* standing on an Ionic fluted column!" Lawyer Faithfull was then very popular in Brighton, a public orator and a keen politician; but in spite of these apparent advantages the chapel congregation evidently became divided and dissatisfied, and Mr. Faithfull retired, only to build another chapel in Church Street, whence he also retired, to become the first M.P. for Brighton, when, after the Reform Act of 1832, Brighton was allowed to return two members.

It is at this point, 1825, that the Church of England comes on the scene, and the person who took over the building was a remarkable man—known, alas! now only in the memory of comparatively few people—the Rev. Robert Anderson. The history of Trinity Chapel would be incomplete, indeed no history of Church life in Brighton would be complete without more than a passing reference to this profound and humble saint. It is fair to say that men like Robert Anderson, scattered over this country in towns and villages between



1825 and 1850, were the salvation of the catholicity of the Church of England. After being in the Madras Civil Service and Professor of Oriental languages in the East India College at Haileybury, he took Orders from deep conviction in 1821, when he was 29 years old, and on removing to Brighton to be with his mother, he found Trinity Chapel vacant. He bought the building, partly rebuilt it, and received Bishop Carr's licence to officiate there, which he did for the first time on December 21, 1825. The chapel was consecrated on April 21, 1826, under a special Act of Parliament. For seventeen years, until his death in 1843, Robert Anderson ministered to a congregation which grew in numbers and devotion. In theology he called himself a Catholic—though he had no official connexion with the Oxford Movement (1833-45)—and the meaning which he attached to the word "Catholic" was "believing all—not a selected few—of the Truths which God has preserved in the Holy Scriptures and given to His Church to proclaim." He loved the early Fathers, and after them, Hooker, George Herbert, Jeremy Taylor, Leighton, and Keble were always appealed to by him as the real

exponents of the mind and soul of the Church of England. We are not surprised to learn that the practical and catholic piety of Robert Anderson profoundly influenced a large number of people in his day. A marble tablet, now under the gallery of the church, bears its mute witness to his saintly character and work.

From 1843 to 1847 the incumbent was the Rev. C. E. Kennaway, and then on August 15, 1847, came the man who has made Trinity Chapel famous throughout the whole world—Frederick William Robertson.

The incumbents of Trinity Chapel, since it became devoted to Anglican uses, have been the following :—

- 1825. REV. ROBERT ANDERSON.
- 1843. REV. C. E. KENNAWAY.
- 1847. REV. F. W. ROBERTSON.
- 1853. REV. D. GRIFFITH.
- 1856. REV. H. H. WYATT.
- 1866. REV. E. VINE HALL.
- 1870. REV. R. D. COCKING.
- 1898. REV. FELIX ASHER.

The building has been renovated and greatly improved by the present incumbent.

## II

"Bath, February 7, 1916.

"DEAR DEAN HENSON,

"Your letter of the 5th inst. raises very interesting questions as to the Rev. Frederick Robertson, and stirs my memories of the state of religious opinion in the middle of the 19th century. As I am one of the few survivors of that period who was in close touch with leading theologians, and still retain a vivid memory of the time, I will try to put down my witness in detail and in full.

"In 1850 I was resident Scholar of Wadham College (in my 19th year) and in close association with Richard Congreve, and through him with Mark Pattison, Goldwin Smith, Arthur Stanley, and other liberal leaders, and I soon became intimate with the inner circle of Jowett's Balliol pupils, and those of John Matthias Wilson of Corpus College. I took my degree in 1853, and was tutor of Wadham 1854-5 and member of the Essay Society founded by George Goschen, George Brodrick, Henry N. Oxenham, etc.,

etc. All this to explain my means of knowledge.

"In 1847-52, I was at times at Brighton where some of my relations lived, and I would go with them to hear Frederick Robertson preach. His appearance, voice, manner in the pulpit were the very ideal of a fashionable preacher. At first, like a shameless schoolboy and undergrad., I fear I thought him too 'elegant' to be either deep in feeling or wide in knowledge. I rather think cynical clubmen from London felt something of the kind. To know what Brighton was in 1847, read Thackeray's sketches from *Punch*.

"Robertson died at the age of 37 (the psychologic age of religious reformers!), and his ministry at Brighton was from 1847 to 1853. Now, during those six years, the so-called religious world was divided in the great struggle (after the Tractarian Movement and the secession of Newman and Manning) between the old Evangelical and the High Anglican and Catholic parties. The 'High and Dry' *via media* Churchmen, to which my family and 'pastors and masters' belonged, was moderate, orthodox, and stiff. Nothing in the shape of a Broad

Church existed as a party. Whatever individual clergymen thought, they had put out nothing like negative doctrines and formed no 'school.' Frederick D. Maurice (afterwards my own friend, preacher at Lincoln's Inn, and colleague) was reprimanded by Dr. Jelf at King's College, where I was once at school, in 1851, and was expelled in 1853. Jowett's salary was stopped at Oxford, and he was summoned by the Vice-Chancellor to subscribe the 39 Articles. It was not until the publication of 'Essays and Reviews' (1860) that even the nucleus of anything like a party or school, new type of theological opinion, began to form, and that mainly under the attempt to excommunicate and penalise the Essayists and their friends and supporters. It was a friend and pupil of Jowett who urged me to write my review in the *Westminster Review* of October, 1860, because Jowett thought their book had died still-born and an attack might wake up the critics. And when my *Westminster* Article coined the name *Neo-Christianity*, and declared that it described an organised movement, I am sure that no 'Broad Church' existed previously.



“From the publication of ‘Essays and Reviews’ in 1860 until the judgment of Lord Westbury in the P.C. on the case of Henry Bristow Wilson, 7th Essayist, in 1863, there was much private discussion on 39 Articles and Verbal Inspiration of the Bible, but no public utterances of any importance by Churchmen. Bishop Colenso was ‘excommunicated’ by Bishop Gray in 1863, but confirmed by the Law Courts in 1866 in his See. That is to say, from the 13 years from Robertson’s death until the final exoneration of Broad Churchmen by Courts of Law in 1866, and then the accession of Bishop Tait, the first of the Essayists, to Canterbury in 1869, liberal Churchmanship remained sporadic and negligible. Stopford Brooke’s ‘Life of Robertson’ appeared in 1865 and had an immense success. The question is—why was Robertson not appreciated in all the years between 1850 to 1865? and why was he then so warmly received?

“There are here two questions—I will try to answer both. 1. Robertson published nothing in his lifetime. His hearers at Brighton were unintellectual, invalids, commonplace middle-class women who

thought him 'charming' and his wife beautiful and gay. The occasional visitors of intelligence thought him 'just the man for Brighton,' and went back to town. There was nothing in his ordinary sermons that touched on dogma, or could be regarded as unorthodox, nor any doubt that Scripture was the Word of God. Nobody was startled nor offended. And we all came away deeply 'edified.'

"2. The years from Robertson's death until the publication of his 'Life' were years in which both lay and clerical Churchmen were very careful not to rouse suspicions of unorthodoxy and heresy, and waited to see how public opinion would form. All this time Jowett, Stanley, Tait, Pattison, and many men of academic influence were working to form a Broad Church School; and by the failure of all attempts to crush inquiry by Episcopal and Lay tribunals in 1866, this "School" became free to speak out and to enrol support. Just at that moment, Stopford Brooke's 'Life' appeared, and then for the first time, Churchmen in search of light and free air found a young divine of spotless character and personal holiness, who taught a pure form of Christianity as far from Calvin



and Luther as from Rome, quite untainted by any attack on the creeds and formulas and equally free from any critical scepticism of Holy Writ. Laymen and clerics, in search of a freer view of Church and Bible, fell upon the story of a truly spiritual divine, who could not be classed with any of the contesting 'parties,' and against whom the most subtle casuist could bring no indictment of 'heretical opinion.' Stopford Brooke really discovered Robertson, made him the herald of a more spiritual form of Gospel, whilst Jowett, Maurice, Colenso, Wilson, and Voysey all challenged *dogma*, and got into litigation and controversy.

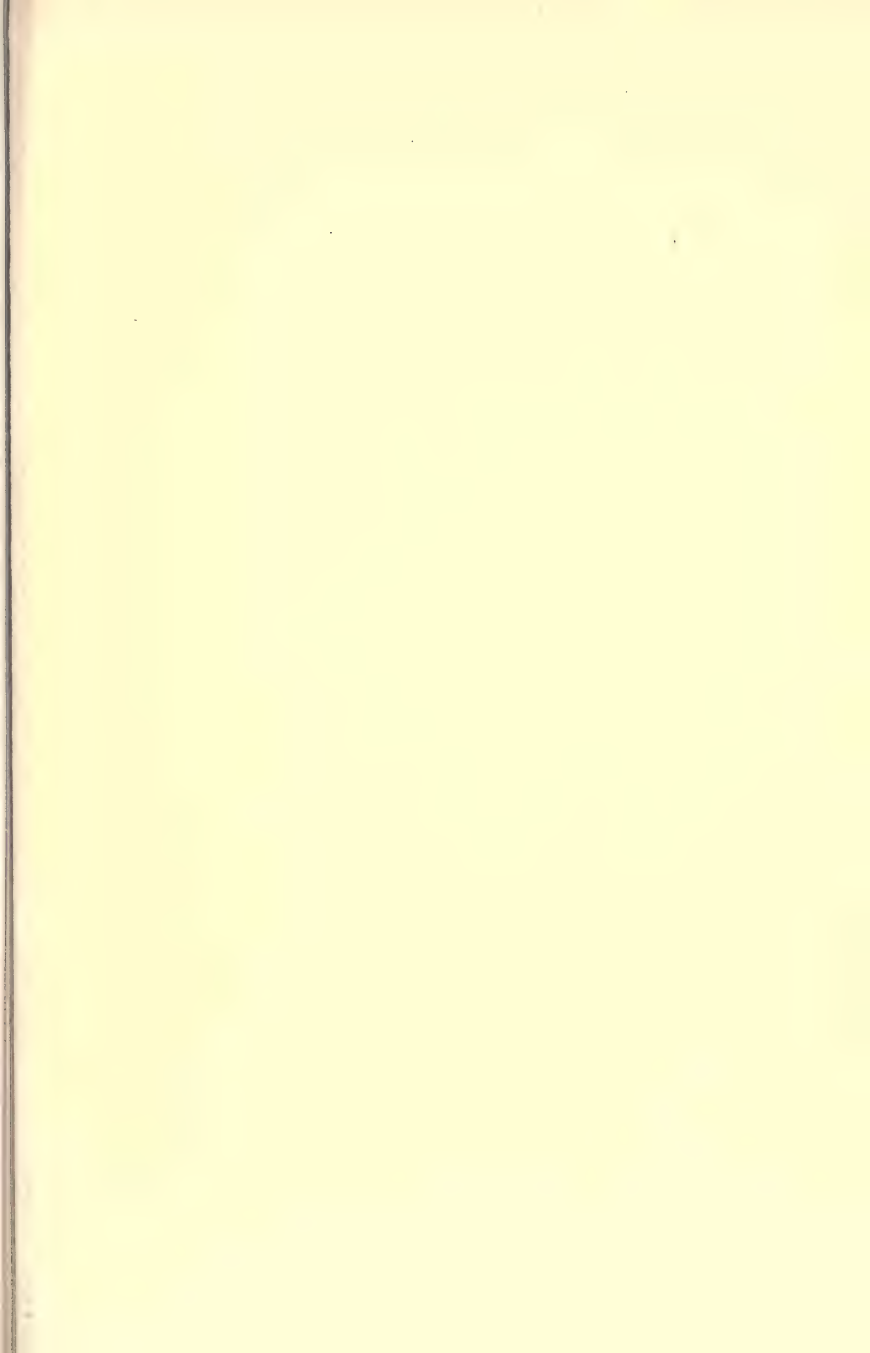
"Such is the explanation of your dilemma by a mere outsider. But there are no doubt others who could give you better answers.

"I am,

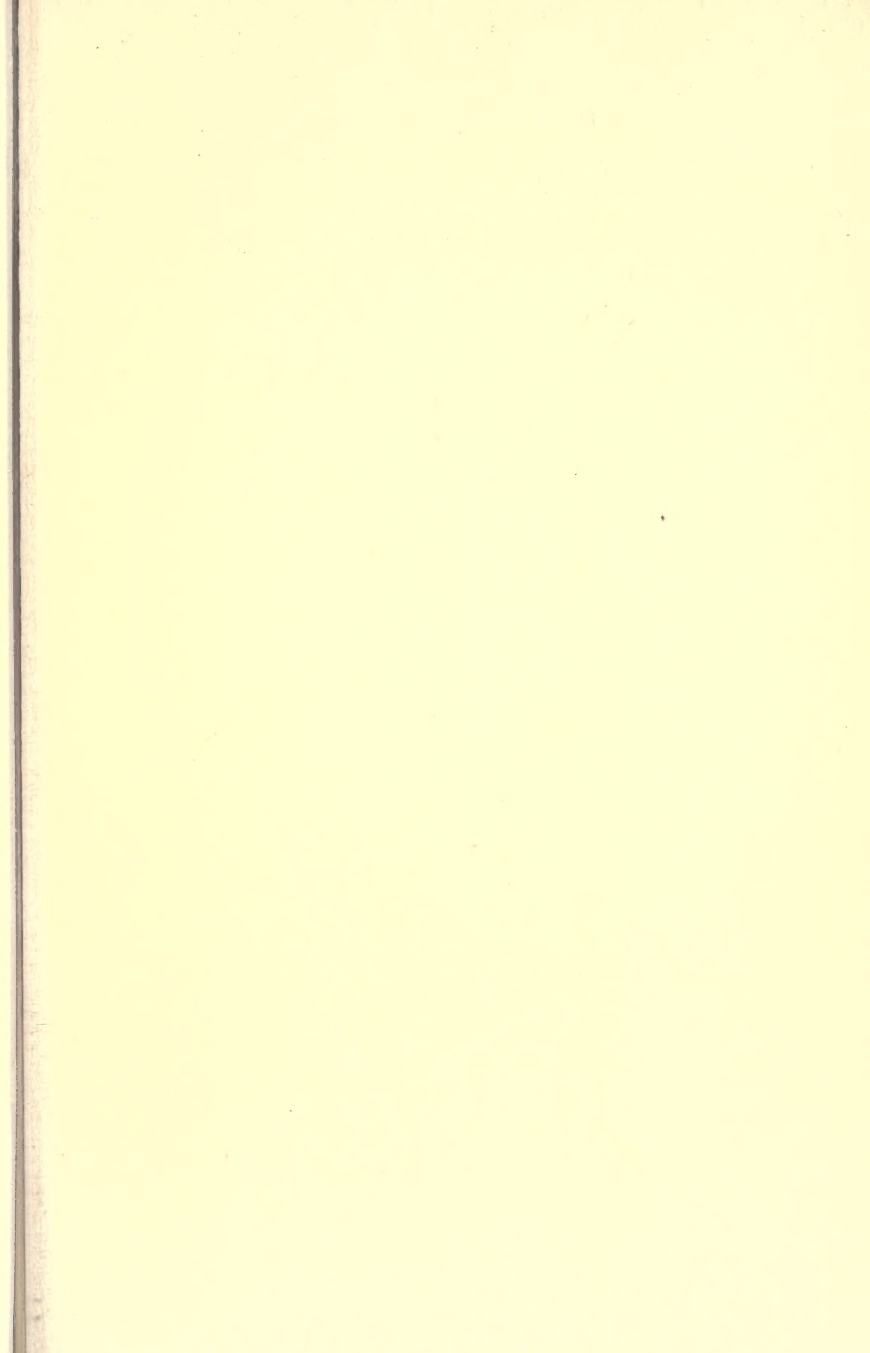
"Yours sincerely,

"FREDERIC HARRISON."

THE END









[illegible]

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